DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 099 356 SP 008 661

AUTHOR Coon, George; And Others
TITLE The Practicum.
INSTITUTION Oakland Univ., Rochester, Mich.
NOTE 24p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Early Childhood Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; Microteaching; *Practicums; *Practicum Supervision; *Preservice Education; Student Participation; Synthesis

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the structuring of practicum experiences for pre- and inservice early childhood teachers as devised by Oakland University. Covered are the types of practicum experiences and objectives, including: (a) broadening student experiences over a wide range of settings involving or relating to young children--these experiences being generally short term and requiring minimal participation; (b) providing students with intensive and deepening experiences--these being of a total participatory nature, involving the students with the children, parents, school, and community; and (c) incorporating all facets of the program through a synthesizing experience in which the student brings together all the relevant academic and experiential knowledge gained throughout the training program and uses this to design a new program. Included also are various methods and criteria for selecting practicum sites and leaders. Guidelines delineate the role of supervision, the sequencing of the practicum experiences, and the value of the experience. (JCW)

SEP. 30 1974

THE PRACTICUM

Oakland University
Rochester, Michigan

by

George Coon, Professor of Education

Robert Christina, Assistant Professor of Education

Ronald L. Cramer, Professor of Education

Doris Sponseller, Instructor

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Oakland University
School of Education
Early Childhood Project
Rochester, Michigan 48053

I. Introduction

This chapter is intended for trainers of early childhood teachers and field personnel who have pre-service and/or in-service training responsibilities for practicum experiences. As a result of reading this article it is anticipated that the reader could and would be motivated to:

1. Design or modify a practicum component for pre-service and/or in-service training of teachers.
2. Prevent or remediate selected problems that occur in administration, implementation and evaluation of practicum experiences.
3. Select and evaluate sites for the possible types of practicum experiences useful in early childhood programs.

II. Types of practicum experiences

Practicum experiences can cover an extremely wide range of settings in which expected student behaviors vary on a number of dimensions. The diversity of settings, the sequence of experiences, the balance of types of experiences and the areas of emphasis should be related to the goals of the particular training program and the expected competencies that students are to demonstrate. They should be flexible enough to allow the entering characteristics of the students to play a role in determining which practicum experiences will be emphasized and to enable some choices by students as to the types of experiences which are most in accord with their perceived needs.

In general, the practicum experiences can be classified into three major types, each with a different goal emphasis. Some are designed to extend and broaden student experience over a wide range of settings which involve or relate to young children. These are usually of a short term and require minimal praticipation, and may not all directly concern young children. For example, even though students may be planning to work with young children of a particular age level, it is beneficial for them to gain some experience with infants and adolescents so that they have a developmental perspective concerning the educational needs of children. Similarly, experience in programs which serve physically ill or handicapped, emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded children give students a better understanding of normal children. Also, even though a program focuses on low income and/or minority children, some experiences with children of middle class backgrounds may add another dimension of understanding.

Most of these wide ranging experiences will be of an observational or minimally participatory nature since the major goal is to 'open up' the student's awareness of the many forces in society which are concerned with

the young child and to enable them to compare, contrast and evaluate the educational influences of parents, community, and type of school program on the child's development.

An essential ingredient of any practicum experience is concurrent training for students in the use of observational tools and analytical methods so that skill can be gained in these areas. Training and practice in the use of these techniques make the difference between active observational involvement and passive 'just being there' in the practicum site. (See appendices A-E) Also essential, of course, is that the academic content of the program prepares students for these experiences and that seminars for discussion to relate knowledge to experienced reality are provided as an integral part of the practicum.

Another type of experience which allows students to take an initial dip into the teaching milieu is that of micro or mini teaching. These specific short term participatory experiences can be of the type in which the teaching setting is simulated or can be brief participation in an actual setting with young children. Either can be recorded on video tape so that there can be a later analysis by both students and supervisory personnel. It is hoped that compentencies needed for later long term involvement can be initially identified and skill can begin to develop. Usually an effective method of analysis is one in which the student evaluates the transactions that actually took place and records not only whether intended outcomes were achieved but also lists the unintended outcomes that occurred. (One model of this type is based on the work of Robert Stake. Appendix A) The microteaching experience, although artificial in many respects, can serve as a valuable initial broadening experience as well as being used to meet other objectives at other times in the total range of practicum experiences.

A second goal emphasis and type of practicum experience provides students with intensive and deepening experiences. These experiences are primarily of a total participatory nature in which students are immersed in the practicum environment. In this type of experience students should come to know a setting very well and should become skilled in dealing with a particular group of children, parents, school or center staff, and, hopefully, also with the specific community in which the practicum site is located.

This total participation can vary in length from one or two weeks of all day participation as an aid in a hospital nursery or clinic, to a one term student teaching type of experience, or to an all year intern assignment in a particular school or center where all academic work is done in conjunction with that one practicum site. The value of students getting to know one site very well must be weighed against the advantages of having students in two or three intensive sites for time periods of less than a year. Obviously, each kind of practicum site will enable students to have the opportunity to develop a somewhat different set of teaching competencies and the decision as to which type of site assignment will be made should relate to the objectives seen as primary for the training program.

The student's role in the various sites might differ with the needs of the particular sites. In sites which have been identified as 'models' by the training institution, the student might be there primarily to learn how to emulate the practicum leader and develop skill in working in that particular type of setting. In other sites which have been chosen because of perceived needs for change or strengthening of the program, the students who participate will be expected to initiate and develop new methods in cooperation with the practicum leaders. In this type of site the experience of learning to act as an effective change agent in the school and community will add another dimension to the student's training.

Whether the in-depth experiences are designed as team or individual participation will also determine the type of learning outcomes. In some settings a student may fill a number of team roles; in another his role may be a well defined one; in still another he will be expected to work independently as the regular practicum leader gradually allows him to take over the class. Each type of relationship has certain values and will be determined partially by the type of setting and partially by the characteristics of the particular students and practicum leaders.

A third type of practicum experience which can contribute greatly to the overall competency of the student is that which can be called a "synthesizing" experience. In order to have this type of experience available to students there must be an early identification of interested community groups in need of help in starting new programs for young children. This usually involves initial contacts with the designated communities, setting up community committees to provide input in the planning, reviewing research, developing and writing of a proposal which has potential for continued funding, planning of curriculum, obtaining a site and designing the educational environment, buying equipment, starting the program and teaching in it during the initial phase of operation, developing and carrying out parent education, carrying on evaluation measures during the course of the program's operation and writing a final report when the student's participation period is ended.

Such a synthesizing experience can, of course, include only part of this sequence rather than incorporating all of its facets, but the depth of involvement does seem to be related to the number of strength of competencies which can be developed by this type of experience. In addition, the process of bringing together all of the relevant academic and experiential knowledge gained throughout the training program and using it creatively in the design of a new program provides a unique opportunity for students to test their abilities in the

practicum experience. It also necessitates teamwork of a very practical nature since the goal of actual program operation is dependent on effective teamwork. Early childhood programs vary greatly in the type or range of practicum experiences offered. Oakland University provides all three type of experiences in its training program and the emphasis on each corresponds to the three terms during which the program operates.

The Oakland University practicum experience is designed on three levels, each with a major goal which influences the types of sites selected. The first level, corresponding with the first term of study, has as a goal the extensive exposure of the young child. Included in the initial practicum are clinical sites, community sites, and school sites which offer varying models of early childhood education. These experiences are primarily of an observational or short-term participatory nature. Choices of these sites have been made by staff members and consultants who conduct modules concerning the Development of the Infant and Young Child, The Young Child in Family and Society, and Alternative Models for Early Childhood Education.

Practicum II consists of intensive experience by the full-time students in sites where they interact as a team with practicum leaders. These practicum leaders are teachers in elementary classrooms, nursery schools and child care centers who are also part-time Master's candidates in the Early Childhood Program. During this practicum, students become involved in active participation with both children and parents of the specific communities where the practicum sites are located. Because Oakland University serves a wide georgraphical area the sites are diversified, including a number of communities, various minority groups, both public and private institutions, and a range of age levels from preschool through second grade.

In the spring, students have a third type of practicum experience which serves to synthesize the total work that they have done. In teams of four or

five they are assigned to practicum sites in schools or agencies where a need for an early childhood program has been expressed but is presently not in operation. During Practicum III, students plan, implement, and evaluate a program for young children and their parents. They develop the facilities, teach the children, conduct parent-education meetings, and carry out research and evaluation measures. During the term they work closely with early childhood staff members and with practicum leaders aiding in a consulting capacity.

III. SELECTION PROCESS

Various methods of selecting practicum sites can be developed, depending on the goals of the particular training program. A description of the method used by Oakland University follows:

In order to provide the data necessary for the evaluation and selection of the practicum sites and leaders and to provide assistance to staff and community committee members in this process, a number of instruments were developed. These instruments were designed to be used in the process of initial selection of practicum sites, a major task during the year of the planning grant. They were not designed as research instruments but rather as a type of "action research" instrument. That is, action was necessary; sites had to be chosen. These instruments provided a basis for selection which was somewhat more precise than a purely intuitive selection, and served to focus the selection process on criteria which had been set up by the staff and community committee.

Information on potential sites for the three modules in Practicum I was gathered by a Descriptive Site Form (Appendix A_1, A_2, A_3) which indicated types of sites and other pertinent data. The specific choices and extent of the use of sites was then made by the staff members who developed each particular module. For the module concerning Development of the Infant and Young Child, pediatricians, clinicians, psychologists and educators decided on the specific sites. Those to be used during the "Child in Family and Society" Module were chosen by the educators, sociologists, and community members who were to be teaching in this module. The sites chosen are ones which are in the specific communities where the "community faculty" live.

For the educational sites used in the module on Alternative Models for Early Childhood Education, the final selection and extent of use of these sites were determined by the educators teaching this module. In addition to the Descriptive Site Form, the Site Evaluation Form, Part I (Appendix B_1)

was used to provide more detailed information about the educational sites.

The instruments used in selecting Practicum II Sites were designed to aid staff and community committee members in their evaluation and selection of sites They are not comprehensive or perfect insturments but served to focus the attention of the committee on the major areas of our concern and on the qualities of leaders that were of particular importance to us. They include the Site Evaluation Form (Appendix B_1 and B_2), the Practicum Leader Evaluation Form (Appendix C), the Interview Form (Appendix D) and the Site Observation Form (Appendix E). Each of these will be discussed later in some detail.

Other criteria used in selection of these sites were the following:

1. Sites should be included from both preschool and kindergarten primary age levels.
2. The number of sites from the major communities and minor communities should have balance.
3. The sites should include ones with varying low income and/or minority populations.
4. Some sites should be part of area public school systems, some should be Headstart or comparable programs, and some should be private programs.
5. Sites should include some which have effective programs in "ideal' or highly desireable sites and others which have effective programs in minimal or inadequate sites.

Other criteria used in selection of practicum leaders were the following:

1. Some leaders should be chosen who have had on a few years teaching experience and others should be chosen who have had many years experience.
2. All leaders should prossess a B.A. degree and be interested in working toward an M.A.T. with specialization in Early Childhood.
3. Leaders with a number of different teaching styles should be selected. However, they must be evaluated by the committee as effective teachers who are open to meaningful change and have a diversity of strengths to share.
4. Leaders should be willing to work in team situations with professionals, fellows, and paraprofessionals and must have had some experience in a team situation.
5. Leaders should be located in sites in which the director, principal or other supervisory personnel are supportive of their participatio

The process of site and practicum leader selection was one which involved both Oakland University staff members and a sub-committee of the Community Advisory Commitee. After the initial screening of twenty-seven sites by the Practicum Director (using SEF, Part I) a visitation team of two to four members

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

visited each site, observed the class, and interviewed the potential leader. This team had at least one staff member and one community member. Since not all staff or community members visited each site, information was gathered by the use of the If and SOF so that committee members would be able to discuss specifics about the site and the potential leaders. The data provided by these forms and othe opinions of those team members who had visited particular sites were then used as a basis for completing the SEF, Part II and the PLEF.

If there were questions about a particular site or a difference of opinion, other team members made a second or third visit. After all sites and leaders had been discussed by the sub-committee they were rated and the final selections were made. Since community committee members from particular communities were most interested in the sites selected in their area, the visitation teams often reflected this. The data gathering and evaluation instruments were helpful in identifying sites which met the stated criteria and leaders who exemplified the qualities of effective teaching that staff and community committee members had indicated were of major importance.

The instruments were also evaluated and revised during the period when they were in use as team members gave suggestions for making them easier to use or more precise. The instruments appended here are the third revision. Although further revision is still necessary, team members agreed that they had served their purpose of focusing attention on the major areas of our concern and had aided the process of evaluation and selection of Practicum II sites and of the Practicum Leaders.

The selection of Practicum III sites were aided by the use of the SEF, Part I. These sites, however, were chosen primarily on the basis of expressed need of particular school systems or agencies for a short term Early Childhood Program and the availability of a potential facility in which a program could be conducted.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The cooperation and interest of the school, community or clinical agencies are also vital to ensure the success of practicum experiences. Whether the experience will be of a short term or of a longer in depth nature, the persons who are directors, principals, or supervisors of the particular school agencies must be fully informed as to the nature of the practicum experience and their role in relation to the university for continuing feedback from them during and after the experience should be maintained.

In addition, it is desireable that the training institution provide reciprocal service where possible, either by offering inservice workshops for staff members, enabling practicum leaders or their staff to take credit courses which lead to degrees, or providing consulting services, special materials, or university speakers for the cooperating agencies. The success of the practicum experiences and the continued willingness of school and community personnel to cooperate in providing sites for these experiences often rest on their feeling that their relationship with the training institution is a reciprocal one in which both parties gain benefits. They must also feel that the university welcomes dialogue concerning problems that have occurred and suggestions for improving the practicum experiences.

ONce sites have been selected, the further development of the site depends on the nature of the practicum experiences for which it is to be used.

The universitystaff must provide clear explicit information to both student and practicum personnel and have well planned procedures for obtaining evaluation of the experiences from both groups also. Often the evaluations provided will pinpoint concerns and problems which can be avoided during later practicum experiences.

In service training for practicum personnel is an important aspect, expecially in those sites with a perceived need for university in put. When the entire staff of a practicum site can be involved in training, the effect

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

will be most striking. If, however, only selected practicum leaders are given training the total program can still benefit greatly if part of their training deals with communicating their knowledge to peers, paraprofessionals, parents, and volunteers. In practicum sites with "model" programs the training resources of these schools can be sometimes utilized by the university.

Whatever the types of practicum experiencs which have been selected, planning to insure meaningful relationship between the various types is very important. In addition to student participation in a variety of sites, it is often helpful if practicum leaders can have the opportunity to visit other programs. Once persons are at work in one particular program, they rarely have the chance to broaden their own focus. Thus, while students are participating in their sites, an opportunity provided for them to view other settings is often beneficial.

Feedback from the practicum experiences also provides direction for the theoretical components of the program as university personnel and field personnel share their perspectives with one another. The practicum experiences cannot be seen in isolation from the academic experiences and the persons at work in each component must have a continuing dialogue, as well as the opportunity to become actively involved in both aspects of the program.

Therefore, the practicum experience is seen as providing not only for strengthening student learning but also as a means of strengthening the understanding of university personnel and of providing field personnel in schools and communities with a greater voice in determining the course of early childhood education. Many persons at work in the community welcome the opportunity to make known their concerns and problems. They also appreciate evidence that the students and faculty of the university are not encased in an "ivory tower" but are really interested in becoming involved as change agents through the practicum experiences.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In the search for methods of developing competent early childhood teachers and of means for helping present teachers to change their behaviors to become more effective, the practicum experiences can be an ideal vehicle. Communication and cooperation between university staff, students, and teachers and othe in the field are essential for any long lasting changes to occur.

IV Guiding Practicum Experiences

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A. Supervision

Supervision of the practicum experiences should be under the direction of one person who has prime responsibility but should also involve the other university staff members who are teaching in the academic and theoretical components of the curriculum. This enables them to evaluate both the students' competencies in translating theory to practice and their own abilities to teach content which is relevant to the needs of students and the realities of the practical school and agency situations. By engaging in active supervision and support of students in the field, the training staff can also be broadening and deepening their own requirement that they are to be actively involved in this supervisory role, should be stated.

The major responsibility for supervision, as well as selection, rests on the practicum director. The director should be a university staff member who also has teaching duties but who can devote a major portion of time to the practicum component.

The amount and type of supervision required varies also with the types of experiences and the types of objectives. This accomplishment of exploratory objectives are usually evaluated by seminars or other discussions, by written observational reports or by the completion by students of observational forms. The on site supervision ranges from no university personnel being present to the presence of the practicum director for the entire experience. Since many sites may be utilized concurrently for exploratory objectives, often the supervision is by self report, later evaluation by the directors of the sites, and by the verbal or written methods outlined above.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Measurement of the accomplishment of performance objectives is sometimes done by the methods used for exploratory. Since student behavior is being observed, however, the major methods of evaluation are either video taping of student performance or actual on site observation by university personnel. Essential for these types of supervision are an initial statement of the planned behavior, observation of the behavior, post performance evaluation by student, supervisor, and practicum leader. Students need to be clear concerning the behaviors for which they will be expected to demonstrate competency and the evaluation procedures which will be followed by the supervisor.

Consequence objectives are perhaps more difficult to evaluate since they may be long term or short term in consequence. That is, if long term changes in others occur they can not be immediately evaluated. However, these objectives can usually be observed in short term change by supervisor observation of changes in the practicum sites, observation of new behaviors on the part of practicum leaders, and verbal indication of changed views or practices by site personnel.

School and agency supervisory personnel also play a role in evaluating the successful accomplishment of program objectives. These are expressed both by their evaluation of student participation and acceptance in their site and by their willingness to consult with students and practicum leaders concerning problems. Also, of course, they indicate their evaluation by their willingness to participate further in the practicum aspects of the university training program.

B. Sequencing

The sequence of experiences, the emphasis, and the balance between the three types of practicum experiences varies greatly in training programs but usually each type is followed in the sequence described

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

here and the first two types are provided concurrently. If the sythesizing experience is provided, it is the culmination of the students' program.

The major guidelines for determining the type and amounts of various practicum experience is that each experience should be carefully chosen to complement a specific academic or theoretical component of the program and that each be related to specific competencies necessary for students to successfully complete the program.

Practicum experiences are generally sequenced from theory to application in the real world. However, there are not inherent barriers which prevent plans from being inductive or proceeding from a real experience to a generalization of the theory. Furthermore, it is the contention of these writers that an effective practicum component for a teacher training program requires inductive and deductive experiences.

Inductive site experiences consist of general purposes for the experience with extensive post-discussion. For example, an observation of an instructional site may be planned where participants only preparation is a brief description of the site and the community it serves. Participants have at best a general goal of evaluating the relevance of the site for instruction. In a sense, an inductive experience is a goal-free evaluation where participants are asked to infer the appropriateness of the site through watching what actually happens. During the post-discussion of the experience many divergent views may and are encouraged to occur.

In deductive site experiences the site provides an opportunity to accomplish restricted purposes. At the site, the participant has a limited range of purposes. Instead of inferring, the primary purpose is

to confirm, reject and/or perform the preconceived purposes for the experience. In this goal-directed experience, convergent responses are encouraged and expected.

Differences between inductive and deductive experience could be illustrated by two common practicum experiences. In the first, a visit is made to observe the program at a new day care center. During the same visit or at another visit an attempt is made to observe the amount of language at the new day care center through the use of an observation schedule. Both observations have purposes but differ as to degree of specificity. The first is inductive; the second is deductive. However, any visit may and perhaps should have a number of deductive and inductive purposes.

C. Value

Previous discussion has indicated that practicum experiences are diverse and bridge the gap between theory and practice in inductive and deductive directions. In addition, practicum experiences resemble real experiences because they occur in real environments, but unlike reality, every attempt is made to insure a successful experience for the participant.

Failure of a participant to do well in a practicum experience may indicate a deficiency in the participant's theoretical preparation, the experience itself or a combination of both. Although performance in a practicum experience may be considered in predicting how a participant will do in a real situation, there is no toxonomy of practicum experiences. There is no guarantee of later success in the real world; but practicum experiences which resemble real experiences and meet other criteria for practicum experiences may assist participants because:

1. The greater the degree of similarity between practicum

experiences and the real world, the more likely each is to require the same abilities. Given sufficiently diverse practicum experiences, the probability of developing similar abilities is greatly increased. The controlled, successful practice participants receive through practicum experiences will have many direct applications in subsequent positions.

2. Although all the abilities necessary for success in the real world will not be learned, the partial learning will make learning the remainder easier. It is readily apparent that with very few exceptions, it is not possible to duplicate all conditions and, consequently, provide practice for all necessary abilities. However, a participant who has some of the necessary abilities will probably be better prepared for a position than other candidates who have not had the experiences.
3. Once participants demonstrate they already have certain skills, they cannot fail to learn those skills. If no opportunity is provided to demonstrate competency there is no indication the participant will fail to successfully perform in the real world. A progmatic means of insuring a participant will be able to perform is to have them perform before real life demands require performance.

Practicum experiences bridge the gap between theory and practice. They occur in real environments as much as possible to enhance the resemblance of practicum experiences to reality, but their potential benefit is dependent a degree to which planners insure successful relationship of theory and reality more than it is to its degree of resemblance to reality. Although a major aim of practicum experiences

is to resemble reality, real environments are modified to enhance the possibility of achieving what program planners believe is necessary for a successful teacher.

Practicum experiences are not "survival of the fittest" experiences. Every attempt is made to insure that appropriate supervisory personnel, methods and materials are available at each site to insure participant and pupil success. Doubtlessly, practicum experiences are not sufficient to insure the success of a training program, but it is unrealistic to expect successful training programs without well-planned practicum experiences.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

APPENDIX A

Copy of the Model for Teaching

Doris Sponseller, Early Childhood Project, School of Education
Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

*** MODEL TO BE USED FOR PLANNING AND EVALUATING OF TEACHING

Part I INTENTION

A. General goals (What are prime areas of concern to which experience is addressed? Cognitive, motor, social, aesthetic, perceptual, language, emotional, etc.)

B. Analysis of teaching/learning outcomes

1. Antecedents: Characteristics of learning, environment, prerequisite experiences, etc.

2.

2. Transactions: What will occur in the teaching/learning situation?

a. Methods by which goals will be achieved

(1) Type of experience--expository, discovery, guided discovery, etc.

*(2) Sequence of experience--step by step events or environmental setting used for certain length of time. (If setting, describe it)

*(3) Group individual movement pattern--what children will be doing; what teacher will be doing, what other adults will be doing

b. Materials which will be used (if any)

C. Outcomes

1. Specific intended outcomes (product or process)

2. Methods of evaluating these outcomes

PART II ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Did experience contribute to general goals?

B. Was planning appropriate?

1. Were antecedents correctly identified? (were there differences which required a change in plans or which caused less or more effective experience)

**2. Did transactions occur as planned?

a. As to methods of teaching?

(1) Type of experience?

(2) Sequence of experience?

(3) Group/individual roles?

b. As to materials used.

**C. Outcomes

1. Were intended outcomes reached? Were there unintended outcomes?

2. How effective were methods for evaluating outcomes?

* If a team plan, each individual should describe his or her role separately.

**If a team plan, achievements should be evaluated by team for total experience and by individual for his or her role.

***(This is an attempt to translate into action the model of Robert Stakes, discussed by him in "The Countenance of Educational Evaluation, Teacher College Record, 1967)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

APPENDIX B thru G

Can be found in Appendices on PRACTICUM SITES: A PROCEDURE FOR INITIAL EVALUATION AND SLECTION